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L **GREAT PLACES** — lowans' views of what constitutes a great place  
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**Great Places  
ideas abound**

**Governor's challenge  
draws 'onslaught'  
of creative responses**

By Rod Boshart  
The Gazette

DES MOINES — Iowans' views of what constitutes a great place revolve around traditional attractions like the Mississippi River, trail networks and tourist venues, and also new concepts such as a bio-village or state-of-the-art waste disposal.

Those proposals were among the 145 invitations from 91 counties submitted to the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs seeking to land one of the state's three pilot Great Places designations.

"The response was more than overwhelming, I'd have so say," said Sandy Ehrig, of the state Department of Economic Development's community development division in describing the "onslaught" of invitations.

In his Condition of the State address last January, Gov. Tom Vilsack called upon communities to be bold and creative in partnering with state agencies to create places where people would want to live, work, stay and play.

From that challenge sprang ideas like that of Elkader's John Nikolai to enhance and raise the visibility of Clayton County's Motor Mill Town site, a grouping of stone structures built around the natural limestone mill rising 90 feet above the Turkey River.

In Olin, City Clerk Jean McPherson envisioned transforming an empty lot into a town square with bike racks, benches, sheltered picnic tables and "maybe even a fountain," while a 10-county network making up Iowa's Great River Road had thoughts of making the Mississippi River

"a tourist destination of the same significance as Los Angeles or New York City."

In Swaledale, John Drury came up with the idea of erecting a Bio-Village along Interstate 35 that would offer E-85 and biodiesel products, locally produced food in a community store, and a kitchen/restaurant with a working garden and a "visual farm-to-table" concept.

Kate Hawkins of Cedar Rapids noted that 36 small-town post offices in Iowa sport unique murals that she would like to see become an attraction.

She proposed creating passports that could be stamped at each post office where the holder views a mural and eventually a "Mural Masters" designation could go to those who visit all 36 sites.

Ed Mulholland, executive vice chairman of Ensuring Marion's Future, wants Eastern Iowa to become the first U.S. site for a plasma torch facility that would turn waste into usable byproducts.

**Great Places invitations**

Eastern Iowa Great Places invitations:

■ **Cities:** Anamosa, Belle Plaine, Cascade, Central City, Davenport, Elkader, Grinnell, Guttenberg, Hiawatha, Maharishi Vedic City, Marion, Monticello, Mount Pleasant, Muscatine, Postville, Strawberry Point, Washington, West Branch.

■ **Counties:** Clayton, Howard, Jackson, Keokuk, Louisa.

■ **Cedar Rapids:** First Avenue, Indian Creek Nature Center, Margaret Bock Housing Unit.

■ **Cedar Rapids, Coralville, Iowa City:** Creative Corridor.

■ **Dubuque:** Four Mounds Preserve, Recreation Center, Mississippi Riverfront, Performing Arts Center, Rockdale Drive-in Theatre and Entertainment Duplex.

■ **Other:** Amana Colonies; Cedar

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Valley LifeWays, Cedar Falls, Waterloo; Greater Decorah Area, Decorah; Iowa's Great River Road, Allamakee, Clayton, Clinton, Des Moines, Dubuque, Jackson, Lee, Louisa, Muscatine and Scott counties; FFA Historical and Ag Museum, La Porte City; Olin's Town Square, Olin; The Valley, Clermont, Elgin and Wadena.

## Public meetings

■ **The Creative Corridor Great Places** invitation will be discussed at a public meeting on Thursday from 5:30 to 7 p.m. in the Iowa Room in Iowa Hall, Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids.

■ **The First Avenue** group will hold a public event on its Great Places invitation on Tuesday at 7 p.m. at CornerHouse Gallery and

Frame, corner of First Avenue and 28th Street Drive SE, Cedar Rapids. Trees along First Avenue that are endangered by the proposed widening of First Avenue will be identified by tape-wrapping before the event.

"There can be no more bold, innovative idea than to be the first such facility in the United States," Mulholland wrote. "Why can't Iowa, Eastern Iowa in particular, be a leader in this field?"

Asked if a waste-disposal facility would be viewed as a great place, Anita Walker, director of the state Department of Cultural Affairs, said "probably not," noting about 15 invitations didn't fit the

initiative but still would get state attention.

Walker said about 75 "coaches" have been dispatched to the interested communities to help assess their readiness to present offers to the Great Places Citizen Advisory Board, which will select three pilot sites in October to serve as "learning laboratories" for the new initiative.

Walker said state agencies will work with the three designees to explore coordinated, focused ways to deliver technical and financial assistance "to deliver powerful results."

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